

LATINO

The politics of ethnic names



VS

“HISPANIC”

Linda Martín Alcoff

Latino vs. Hispanic

The politics of ethnic names

Abstract

The politics of ethnic names, such as ‘Latino’ and ‘Hispanic’, raises legitimate issues for three reasons: because non-political considerations of descriptive adequacy are insufficient to determine absolutely the question of names; political considerations may be germane to an ethnic name’s descriptive adequacy; and naming opens up the political question of a chosen future, to which we are accountable. The history of colonial and neo-colonial conditions structuring the relations of the North, Central and South Americas is both critical in understanding the political condition of Latinos in the USA and relevant in current colonial relations.

Key words ascriptive class segment · colonialism · ethnic names · Hispanic · Latino · neo-colonialism · political contestation

In 1992 the *New York Times* ran an article with the headline: ‘What’s the problem with “Hispanic”? Just ask a “Latino”.’¹ Self-named ‘Latinos’ have been criticizing the term ‘Hispanic’ for at least 35 years – and the word has even been barred from use in the *Los Angeles Times* because of strong opposition. Rodolfo Acuña claims that ‘Hispanic’ is favored by the middle classes, that it gets more Anglo approval, and that it is the choice of those who oppose bilingual education. This would make it appear that Earl Shorris is correct when he says that ‘Hispanic’ is more to the political right and ‘Latino’ is more to the political left.² Would-be political leaders have long known that one’s choice between these terms can signal one’s political views about assimilation, cultural nationalism, and the relative importance of race. Republican George W.

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Bush clearly favors the term 'Hispanic', whereas, during the election, the Democratic candidate Al Gore stuck more often with 'Latino'. But in some areas of the USA such as New Mexico, much of Texas, and the south-east excluding California, 'Hispanic' is the preferred term and 'Latino' is a term used only by outsiders, thus indicating that geographical context will alter the terms' political meanings.

Are ethnic names merely, then, a way to signal one's political views? Shouldn't descriptive adequacy or accuracy of representation be sufficient to determine the choice of names for a given population? Why does the choice of ethnic names always figure so prominently in political movements? In this article, my aim is to explain how one might understand the relationship between the choice of ethnic names and political contestation, and why ethnic names are sometimes linked to political movements. I will argue that descriptive adequacy is rarely sufficient and political meanings can have a legitimate place as a consideration, and I will use the debate over 'Latino' vs. 'Hispanic' as an instructive example. I will then provide an example of the kind of political consideration that could be considered relevant through an argument that favors the term 'Latino'. I will discuss two contrasting historical moments in which the terms 'Latino' and 'Hispanic' gained some institutionalized currency and legitimacy, in 1898 and in 1978, both of which were signal moments in the history of the colonial relations between Anglo and Latin America. From the lessons of these two examples, I will then draw some conclusions about the comparative explanatory and descriptive value of the two terms. I will not be able to address here the debate over the viability of using any pan-ethnic term, since that brings in other considerations.³

I Ethnic names in a political context

It is difficult to address this issue today without taking on the formidable and comprehensive arguments advanced by Jorge Gracia in his *Hispanic/Latino Identity*, wherein one will find the most philosophically astute and sustained discussion of the topic written to date.⁴ Despite the even-handedness of the book's title, Gracia champions the term 'Hispanic' as a more adequate descriptive term for the new people who were formed through the *encuentro* of 1492 and have come, through subsequent events, to constitute a historical family, **a family with no overarching similarity other than sharing precisely in the set of ongoing and open-ended historical developments that can be dated from that point.** Gracia means this argument to cover Hispanics in Latin America, the United States, and the Iberian peninsula, and he considers in some detail and with much insight the various pragmatic, political, moral, and philosophical objections that have been made against this position.

In a nutshell, Gracia argues that the term 'Hispanic' has descriptive and explanatory advantage in delimiting precisely those who share this historical tie to the *encuentro*, and avoids the disadvantage of requiring a cultural commonality or other kind of homogeneity. Although he eschews cultural commonality in the sense of a discrete shared element of any kind, Gracia also likes the fact that the term 'Hispanic' signals culture as opposed to, for example, political condition, and he recounts with great erudition the complex but interlinked broad cultural traditions that have emerged from the Spanish involvement in the Americas. I cannot take on Gracia's comprehensive account in a single article, but my arguments here will challenge his account in two ways: first, by articulating a meaningful and legitimate way in which political considerations can enter theory-choice in this domain, and second, by arguing that the term 'Latino' has at least one significant advantage that Gracia fails to consider sufficiently, primarily in relation to the issue of colonialism.⁵ Although Gracia addresses with sensitivity the colonial aspects of the original encounter, and its subsequent legacy for the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, he does not address sufficiently, in my view, the more current and recent colonial relations that have structured relationships in the western hemisphere itself. Because of this, he fails to give sufficient importance to the role that ethnic terms have played in cultural nationalist and anti-imperialist struggles of Latinos particularly in the United States.

The contestation over ethnic and cultural names, including the invention of new names and the reinterpretation of old names, has been an integral part of political movements among Latinos in the USA since the 1960s. Today we may think of this issue as one primarily of concern to marketing firms and political strategists who seek the most effective ways to market commodities and/or ideas, and who are rapidly constituting target markets that constitute ethnicity in relation to consumer preference and patterns of consumption. However, students, intellectuals, and political activists have also been very interested in the debates over ethnic names, and all of us are concerned to some extent with how we are named and with avoiding pejorative names. As Gracia explains,

There is nothing so destabilizing to one's self, as an individual person or as a group, than being treated and regarded as something other than what one thinks of oneself. It implies a splitting of one's identity, the undermining of one's credibility, and the destruction of one's dignity. Names have the power to do this.⁶

Thus, although the concern over names may *sometimes* be a mere squabble among intellectuals or a ploy of marketing strategists, it is not *always* reducible to one of these relatively artificial sources.

Moreover, it is a very common experience among many Latinos to have our ethnic labels change as we enter the United States or even simply

as we change locations within it. Because of this, Latinos are relatively sophisticated about the socially constructed character of names; because we experience the dynamism and instability of names, and because we understand the inherent relationship between names and social status.⁷ Gerald Torres recounts the old joke among Mexican-Americans that, if you were really poor, you were Mexican; if you had a little money, you were Mexican-American; if you had a bit more money, you were American of Mexican descent; if you had even more money, you were Spanish; and if you were really well off, you were Italian!⁸

This joke reveals an acute awareness that the process of ethnic and cultural naming is bound up with struggles of power and equality, not only when we are named incorrectly but even when we are named correctly, or named in ways we recognize and approve. The complexity of social and historical reality means that empirical evidence underdetermines our choice of ethnic names. Moreover, the contestations over cultural names are really contestations over historical interpretation, political analysis, and alternative configurations of intra-community relationships. For example, Puerto Ricans in the United States are known among sociologists for generally 'refusing the hyphen', preferring the plain 'Puerto Rican' to 'Puerto Rican-American', thus signaling their affective and political loyalties to '*mi viejo San Juan*'. And it was not until the political resistance among Mexican-Americans became organized and mobilized that the term Chicano even came into existence, emerging as a self-conscious appropriation of a negative term (connoting low class) as a declaration of pride and class consciousness. Thus, various names can work for or against certain alliances, and can be a means to impart a particular account about the historical production of an ethnic group. However, the choice of names is not completely open – names both signal and affect sensibilities – they both respond to and shape social reality. It is because of the overwhelming poverty among Mexican-Americans that the term 'Chicano', with its lower-class connotations, could resonate with the political meanings it was intended to signify. Names do describe groups and group characteristics that already exist, but they also offer explanations about groups and causal accounts of their characteristics, and can thus also communicate their collective intentions.

As Jorge Klor de Alva has argued, ethnic names are used as flags to unite heterogeneous communities across class, race, ethnicity, and even political orientation.

... the appropriation from the elite lore of ancient Mexico of such a seminal emblematic device as Aztlán was the most brilliant political maneuver of the Chicano cultural nationalists. Nothing their critics have done has managed to surpass or equal this feat of organizational strategy. Under no other sign or concept, derived from the left, center, or right, were as many Chicanos mobilized and as much enthusiasm galvanized into political action – except for the concept of *Chicanismo* itself.⁹

This may make it appear that in the context of such movements, the invocation of certain names is a reductively strategic operation, as if one invents fictive histories solely in order to mobilize a community. And, given various government programs meant to redress inequalities, outsiders have often made accusations that the political mobilization of cultural, ethnic, or sexual identities is rife with opportunism. Others have argued that social ontologies should never become the basis of politics or be brought into the arena of public deliberation, since in the latter one should more properly consider social issues and conflicts without attention to identity. In other words, while politicized ontologies effect a cementing of politics to identity, people's political beliefs should rather be developed in an individual process of detached reasoning without separate concern for one's own identity group.¹⁰

But of course, every society constructs its own politically inflected social ontologies which then figure heavily in public discourse. Every society produces its own genealogical and self-legitimizing myths, opportunistically chosen from among the din of history and cultural artifact. In *every* case this choosing is bound up with the political self-image and goals of the community *or* those who dominate it. Why does the United States emphasize its defense of freedom rather than its long commitment to slavery in its own narrativized history about what it means to 'be an American'? On one reading, this is to avoid owning up to past sins and to maintain the illusion of 'leader of the free world' that provides camouflage for this country's imperial excursions. However, although it is surely always a mistake to cover over cultural crimes that figure prominently in the founding of a society, it is not a bad thing to remember, honor, and thus promote the positive past events or positive aspects of one's cultural ancestors. So Chicano nationalists have done with Aztlán. Thus, the political nature of ethnic and cultural naming is not in and of itself reason to view it with disapproval, or consider it politically obstructionist for the development of a potentially universal humanism.

Thus, I would argue that, on the one hand, ethnic names are always bound up with struggles of power and equality, but on the other hand, it is equally clear that the choice of ethnic names cannot operate with disregard for the lived experiences of those for whom the names are meant to apply, and that this provides a check on strategic agendas. In a certain respect, Chicanos exist because Chicanos exist. And in the context of the United States, the naming of minority ethnicities like Latinos and African-Americans is necessary for any adequate understanding of social conditions, apart from any question of political mobilization. In regard to ethnic names, national minorities often form, usually unwillingly, an 'ascriptive class segment' which Mario Barrera defines as a 'portion of a class which is set off from the rest of the class by some readily identifiable and relatively stable characteristics of the

persons assigned to that segment, such as race, ethnicity, or sex, where the relationship of the members to the means and process of production is affected by that demarcation'.¹¹ A group's general position in the labor market, as, for example, unskilled agricultural laborers, along with their specific historical experience, further reinforces the salience of group identity in everyday life. In this case, note that ethnic/racial identity is not *opposed* to class; it is part of *what class is made up of*. But the main point I am making here is that the name Chicano refers to an existing kind, a group with specifiable features. Not every Chicano need be an agricultural laborer, but the fact that the majority of agricultural laborers are Chicano establishes some of the important *cultural* meanings attached to agricultural labor in the United States. Whenever the conditions of migrant farm laborers are discussed in the wider public domain of discourse, and participants debate over the extent that the government should regulate corporate treatment of migrant labor, the unspoken subtext of the discussion will be whether the government should be involved in improving the lives of Mexican laborers. To *not* recognize this fact, and to talk as if one can discuss 'class' without race, ethnicity, or gender, will only continue to obscure the real impediments to social justice. The reason I belabor this point is to stress that the salience of ethnic names in our society is not a choice; the only choice is *how best to represent and explain that salience*.

To summarize my points in this section, the choice of names is inherently political because names always invoke specific genealogical or legitimizing narratives, but they are limited by the need to connect with at least some aspects of lived experience. The process of choosing a name cannot be reductively political or opportunistic, as if these concerns trump any considerations of descriptive adequacy, because the political effects that a name has depends heavily on its capacity for descriptive adequacy, its ability to gel lived experience, to sound right, to make sense of things. So political effectivity is to some extent supervenient on descriptive adequacy. But obviously, there is always more than one story that can be given that gels to some extent with the diversity of lived experience through history and across geographical location. The criteria of descriptive adequacy underdetermines the answer to the question of names. This underdetermination both calls for a political solution and makes a political solution possible in the sense that it makes a space to interject political considerations in the discussion, as one consideration whose importance will vary depending on the strength of other factors. As a further complication, we have to always remember that what ethnic names name is not a static entity, and that names have a constitutive effect on experience as well as on the possibilities of political mobilization. Thus, our political considerations must be both backward- and forward-looking, in offering an account of historical formation as well as a project for the future.

II 'Latino' versus 'Hispanic': 1898 versus 1978

In regard to the particular debates over 'Latino' versus 'Hispanic', let me now raise two interesting and, I would suggest, critical historical moments in the institutionalization and legitimization of these alternative appellations. The first I want to discuss came in 1898, the year which many have taken to symbolize the 'changing of hands' between Anglo and Iberian control over Latin America. Until 1848, the Spanish Empire controlled most of the land mass of the Americas, reaching from what is now California and Colorado to Chile and most of Argentina, and also to Florida, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. By 1920, nearly all of these lands were independent of Spanish colonial rule but had come under various amounts of control by the United States, either through annexation, colonization or a more diffuse but still very powerful control exerted through territorial treaties, military occupation, and neo-colonial relations of economic subordination. The year 1898 symbolized this transfer of power because it was the year that Spain finally left the hemisphere, when Spain was defeated in the Caribbean in a war aptly called the 'Spanish-American War'. As the victor, the United States mandated that Cuba must accept its naval bases and it declared Puerto Rico a 'US territory'. Shortly thereafter, it engineered a coup to create Panama as a nation separate from Colombia, of which Panama had been a province, and thus created a base of economic, political, and military operations by which it could oversee everything to the south; its base in Panama was named, again aptly, the 'Southern Command'.

The United States government developed, and its allies accepted, various ideological spins to justify these relations of inequality: from hemispheric security to big-brother benevolence and stewardship over the processes of modernization and development. Less well remembered today, but still present in the subtexts of the current North American cultural imaginary (such as in the concept that 'Latin America is our backyard'), was the overt reference to a racial and ethnic cultural inferiority that justified US domination over internal affairs. In this broad geo-political context, Walter Mignolo argues that the ideological meaning and significance of 1898 were nothing less than 'a new and crucial turn in the imaginary of the modern/colonial world system':

If the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries were dominated by the Christian imaginary (whose mission extended from the Catholics and Protestants in the Americas, to the Jesuits in China), the end of the nineteenth century witnessed a radical change. **'Purity of blood' was no longer measured in terms of religion but of the color of people's skin**, and began to be used to distinguish the Aryan 'race' from other 'races' and, more and more, to justify the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon 'race' above all the rest. **I submit that the turning point took place in 1898 when the US-Spanish War was justified, from the US perspective, with reference to**

the superiority of the 'white Anglo-Saxon race' whose destiny was to civilize the world over the 'white Catholic Christians and Latins,' a term introduced by the French political intelligentsia and used at that time to trace the frontiers in Europe as well as in the Americas between Anglo-Saxons and Latins ... the year 1898 became the anchor for the US perspective on 'Latinos' continuing until today ... 1898 provided the ideological and historical justification to recast 1848 and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo between the United States and Mexico in an ideological discourse that was still not available at the time.¹²

Mignolo, who builds the above argument on the writings of de Gobineau, Mahan, Burgess, Fiske, and Arendt, thus locates the wider dissemination of the French term for the dichotomy between Anglo-Saxons and Latins at the moment in which it was precisely *that* dichotomy that became mapped onto a racial and imperial cultural imaginary as well as political economy involving US and thus Anglo-Saxon domination over the western hemisphere. If this is right, then, historically, the term Latino signifies and is itself marked by that moment of crystallization in the colonial relation between, not Spain and Latin America, but the USA and Latin America. And, following Ramón Grosfoguel and numerous other sociologists, I would argue that this latter relationship is of much greater and enduring political and cultural relevance for understanding the concrete conditions of life in the western hemisphere for Latinos or Hispanics. In other words, one can only adequately understand the contemporary social location of Latinos 'in relation to the historical- structural dynamics [which have made them] racialized colonial subjects of the USempire',¹³ and not in relation to their historical ties to the colonialism of Spain.

Thus, this historical genealogy of the term brings to the fore the idea that present-day Latinos are those peoples who have been constituted largely in and through a colonialism that has not yet left us, unlike the previous colonialism of Spain, **which has a historical but less important present-day salience in the contemporary political economy of the western hemisphere.** If this is the case, then 'Latino' more accurately names that which is salient in any analysis of what Ilan Stavans persists in calling 'the Hispanic condition'. I do not offer this as an exhaustive argument in favor of the term 'Latino' over 'Hispanic' – there are numerous other issues that could be explored, such as cultural ties, as well as the issue of other connotations in various localities that I cannot address here. I will return to this issue at the end of the article.

The second historical moment I want to bring up occurred actually over a period of years (though of course '1898' is also actually representative of a multi-decade process rather than something occurring in a single year). This second moment really began in 1965, when the new immigration law in the United States ended the previous quotas on

immigration from South and Central America and the Caribbean, bringing millions of people and changing for ever the cultural and political face of the United States. Then, in order to be able to name and govern (in a Foucauldian sense) this burgeoning population, in 1978 the Federal Office of Management and Budget issued Directive No. 15 which instituted the name Hispanic, at the suggestion of the king of Spain(!), **for all those ‘whose “culture or origin” is Spanish, “regardless of race”**.¹⁴ All US state and federal agencies subsequently followed suit in disseminating the ethnic label ‘Hispanic’. One of the main reasons given for choosing ‘Hispanic’ over ‘Latino’ was that ‘Latino’ sounded too much like ‘Ladino’, which was the ancient form of Castilian now spoken only by the descendants of Spanish Jews who went into exile in the 15th century. Maybe this issue was huge in the mind of the king of Spain, but it seems hardly uppermost in the minds of most Latinos today. As many analysts have remarked, in this way the population of ‘Hispanics’ in the USA – now numbering 30 million – was born: it was both introduced into the country and named by the US government. Since that time, every census form and most other government documents have used the term Hispanic to designate peoples from Latin America and have cordoned off the Spanish-speaking Caribbean immigrants within this rubric as well. One can conclude from this with Gerald Torres that, while both the terms ‘Latino’ and ‘Hispanic’ have been chosen by various Latin American communities, the term ‘Hispanic’ has been imposed on us all.¹⁵

Directive No. 15 also defined Hispanicity as a non-racialized ethnicity, and thus reflected, as Luis Angel Toros has argued, several assumptions about race that have long been manifested in US legal history: that (1) ‘race is a fixed, biological trait assigned at birth’, that (2) there are four races, and Hispanics are either white or black, and that (3) race mixtures inevitably fall back into one of the four classified races. The alternative conceptions of racial categories used in Latin America and the Caribbean – **which understand race as a continuum and take mixed identities as the formation of new races rather than forcing them to adopt one or the other of their ‘racial ancestries’** – and which usually figure in US Latinos’ own self-understanding were not allowed to infiltrate US policy. The directive was in contradiction, also, to the US Congress’s decision to cover Mexican-Americans under laws of racial discrimination in light of the 1954 Supreme Court case, *Hernandez vs. Texas*.¹⁶

Aside from the question of race vs. ethnicity, why did the US government choose Hispanic rather than Latino? Why did it not simply follow the use of various national group names that immigrants themselves used before they came to the United States and generally for some years after (some never giving up their self-designation as Cuban or Cuban-American

or Puerto Rican or Salvadoran in favor of the less familiar 'Hispanic')? I am not suggesting a conspiracy on the government's part here in any way, but it is striking in the context of the previous discussion that a term *by connotation* denoting culture rather than nationality and a term that maintains the overall salience of the link to Spain was chosen over a term that would certainly *by connotation* be linked more readily in the mind to the multi-national grouping known as Latin America. Ofelia Schutte has perceptively argued that the use of any pan-Latino or Hispanic term in the United States tends to downplay an individual's tie to her or his country of origin (or their relatives' country of origin) and thus may have the psychological effect of decreasing their sense of alliance and loyalty to that country of origin, which would (and has) been useful at various times for the aims of the US military invasions in Latin America. If this is the case with any pan-ethnic term *vis-à-vis* national term like Cuban, Puerto Rican, etc., it seems more true of Hispanic *vis-à-vis* Latino, given that there is no country or region in this hemisphere with 'Hispanic' as even a part of its name (the island of Hispaniola does not count much in my view because it is not a nationality). Thus, Hispanics have been de-nationalized, de-linked to the multi-national region of the world that represents their group history and, arguably, group interests, in favor of a term that places the emphasis on culture, on language, and that, to the extent it reminds us evocatively of a colonialism, it reminds us of that older, previous, historically impotent colonialism of Spain rather than the one that is all too potent even in our present day.

III Conclusion

I have argued that political considerations, far from being irrelevant to the choice of ethnic names, are legitimate issues to take into account for three different reasons: (1) because non-political considerations of descriptive adequacy will be insufficient to determine absolutely the question of names, (2) because political considerations may well be germane to questions of descriptive adequacy, as in the case of a name that signals relevant political conditions of a group, and (3) because in naming we affect a future which we need then to be accountable to, and we can only be accountable in opening up for discussion the political question of where we want to go.

I have raised one consideration in regard to the choice between 'Hispanic' and 'Latino' that is important and relevant in all of the above ways, because it signifies an important descriptive fact about the group, and because, by making our colonial condition central, it can help to focus both our and Anglo understanding of the causes of that condition.

The choice between these two names is obviously insufficient for the cause of launching a liberatory agenda, and there are many other considerations relevant to the determination of our ethnic name which I cannot pretend to touch on in this short discussion. But I would argue in sum the following: (1) the history of present colonial and neo-colonial conditions that structure relations between the North, South and Central Americas is critically important in understanding the political condition of Latinos in the United States, our condition as an 'ascriptive class segment', and the political contestations in the broader public arena over our civil, political, and economic rights; (2) the historical genealogy of the term 'Latino' corresponds to this era of US colonialism and to the Anglo-Saxon racial and cultural supremacist ideology meant to legitimate that colonialism; (3) by continuing to use the term Latino, then, we might signify this as having continuing relevance in our political and economic condition, thus producing through an emblematic device the anti-colonial constituency of the broadest proportions one can make with an ethnic name in the Americas; and (4) on the other hand, by continuing to use the term Hispanic we may risk losing this political solidarity in favor of a weaker cultural and more distant historical reference that will evade the current colonial relations.

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Notes

1David González, 'What's the Problem with "Hispanic"? Just Ask a "Latino"', *New York Times*, 15 November 1992, sec. 4, p. 6; quoted in Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 191.

2Earl Shorris, *Latinos: A Biography of the People* (New York: W.W. Norton), pp. xvi–xvii.

3My position on this question is closest to Juan Flores's, who explains that there is no mutual exclusivity between the use of a pan-ethnic term, like Hispanic, and the use of a more specific term, like Puerto Rican, and that most use both but in different contexts. Flores argues further that, although the pan-ethnic terms seem to be a *fait accompli* for Latinos, and have some advantages, it would be a mistake to lose completely the use of the more specific terms, which can always offer more accurate and complex renderings of social and cultural realities than pan-ethnic terms. As Flores puts it, 'there is "Latino" only from the point of view and as lived by the Mexican, the Puerto Rican, the Cuban, and so forth; without denying the congruences and threads of interconnection among them that the term implies, "Latino" or "Hispanic" only holds up when qualified by the national-group

angle or optic from which it is uttered: there is a “Chicano/Latino” or “Cuban/Latino” perspective, but no meaningful one that is simply “Latino”. Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-hop*, p. 8; see also ch. 7.

4Jorge Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000).

5Much more extensive discussion of Gracia’s arguments can be found in the articles by Jorge Gracia, Richard Bernstein, Gregory Pappas, Robert Gooding-Williams, and Eduardo Mendieta, with Gracia responding, in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, forthcoming.

6Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity*, p. 26.

7Cf. Suzanne Oboler, *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)presentation in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

8Gerald Torres, ‘The Legacy of Conquest and Discovery: Meditations on Ethnicity, Race, and American Politics’, in *Borderless Borders: U.S. Latinos, Latin Americans, and the Paradox of Interdependence*, ed. Frank Bonilla, Edwin Meléndez, Rebecca Morales, and María de los Angeles Torres (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1998), p. 268, n. 51.

9Jorge Klor de Alva, ‘Aztlán, Borinquen, and Hispanic Nationalism in the United States’, in *The Latino Studies Reader: Culture, Economy, and Society*, ed. Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), p. 71.

10See Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Democracy on Trial* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997).

11Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), p. 212; Quoted in Klor de Alva, ‘Aztlán, Borinquen, and Hispanic Nationalism’, p. 69.

12Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 32–3.

13Ramón Grosfoguel and Chloé Georas, ‘Latino Caribbean Diasporas in New York’, in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, ed. Agustín Laó-Montes and Darlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 98.

14Luis Angel Toro, ‘Race, Identity, and “Box Checking”: The Hispanic Classification in OMB Directive No. 15’, in *The Latino Condition: A Critical Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 53.

15See Torres, ‘Legacy’, p. 265, note 12.

16Contrary to what one might imagine, it has not always been to the advantage of Latinos to be classified as white. This was proven in an important legal case heard by the US Supreme Court in 1954 and discussed by Ian F. Haney López in his ‘Race and Erasure: The Salience of Race to Latinos/as’, in Toro’s *The Latino Condition*, pp. 180–95. The case of Hernandez vs. Texas involved a Mexican-American man convicted of murder by an all-white jury and sentenced to life imprisonment. His lawyer appealed the conviction by arguing that the absence of Mexicans on the jury provided evidence of discrimination, making reference to the famous

Scottsboro case in which the US Supreme Court overturned the conviction of nine black men on the grounds that their trial was discriminatory because of an absence of blacks from the jury. But in the Hernandez case, the Texas Supreme Court had ruled that Mexicans were white people of Spanish descent, and therefore that there was no discrimination in the make-up of the jury. Hernandez's lawyer, James DeAnda, forty years later, recounted how he made his argument against this claim:

Right there in the Jackson County Courthouse, where no Hispanic had served on any kind of a jury in living memory because Mexicans were white and so it was okay to bring them before all-white juries, they had two men's rooms. One had a nice sign that just said MEN and the other had a sign on it that said COLORED MEN and below that was a hand-scrawled sign that said HOMBRES AQUÍ [men here]. In that jury pool, Mexicans may have been white, but when it came to nature's functions, they were not.

Quoted in Roberto Suro, *Strangers Among Us: Latino Lives in a Changing America* (New York: Random House, 1999), p.85.

Not only were Mexicans subject to Jim Crow in public facilities from restaurants to bathrooms, they were also excluded from business and community groups and children of Mexican descent were required to attend a segregated school for the first four grades, whether they spoke fluent English or not. Thus, when they were classified as black, Latinos were overtly denied civil rights; when they were classified as white, the de facto denial of their civil rights could not be appealed. Although the US Supreme Court overturned the Texas Supreme Court's decision in the Hernandez case, its decision indicated a perplexity regarding Mexican-American identity, as Haney López points out. The court did not want to alter the legal classification of Mexicans as white, and so it ended up explaining the discrimination Mexicans faced as based on 'other differences', left undefined. Thus, oddly, the court upheld that there was racial discrimination against Mexicans, but denied that Mexicans constituted a race.

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